

MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS IN KASHMIR AND ITS COVERAGE IN LOCAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

Mental distress is an alarming health issue that is touching at the root of very existence in the contemporary society. Kashmir is no exception. The prolonged conflict prevalent in Kashmir has taken heavy toll on human lives and disrupted psycho-social and economic fabric of the society. In this socio-economic and political context, people have become victims of mental trauma, stress, anxiety, depression and many other mental health disorders. According to 2015 report of MSF on mental distress, the proportion of adult population suffering from symptoms of depression was 41% representing 1.6 million adults. The rate of mental distress is higher among women than men. Further, “on average, an adult living in the Kashmir valley has witnessed 7.7 traumatic events during their lifetime”. In order to influence public opinion on such health issues, newspapers play a key role through intentional advocacy-editorials, columns, and interpretive articles.

In this backdrop, this research, has attempted to study the extent and nature of news coverage given to issues like mental health problems in local broadsheet leading newspaper of Kashmir, ‘Greater Kashmir’. For the purpose of analysis the study has been divided in to two parts. Part-one involves the quantitative approach (content analysis of newspaper) and the second part includes the case study (qualitative approach) of radio programmes on mental distress. The study also includes the secondary analysis of the research done by experts.

KEYWORDS: Mental Distress, Media Coverage of Mental Distress & Kashmir Conflict

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INTRODUCTION

The prolonged conflict prevalent in Kashmir has taken a heavy toll on human lives and disrupted psycho-social and economic fabric of the society. In this socio-economic and political context, people have become victims of mental trauma, stress, anxiety, depression and many other mental health disorders. According to 2015 report of MSF on mental distress, the proportion of the adult population suffering from symptoms of depression was 41% representing 1.6 million adults.

The prevalence rate for depression in district Budgam and Baramulla were reported highest. Approximately one million adults (26%) in Kashmir valley were exhibiting signs of anxiety related disorders. Again Baramulla and district budgam experienced highest prevalence rate. The prevalence of PTSD in the adult population was estimated to be 19%. The prevalence distribution pattern across districts is similar to that found for anxiety and depression. The rate of mental distress is higher among women than men. Further, “on average, an adult living in the Kashmir valley has witnessed 7.7 traumatic events during their lifetime”.

Traumatic event is defined in the Diagnostic and statistical manual (5) as single/multiple events that involve actual or threatened death or serious injury or threat to the physical integrity of the self or others. Exposure to traumatic events (have been recognised as having a crucial role in the development of PTSD and major depressive disorders. The most common traumatic events experienced were natural disasters (94%) and conflict-related trauma (93%).

Patient population (clinical) based studies conducted so far have clearly testified to the fact that a majority of people living in Kashmir are suffering from psychological problems and a significant segment of the population have developed some kind of mental disorder, be it depression, trauma related disorders or substance abuse. Earlier studies conducted by various psychiatrists revealed that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was the most common type of mental illness found in Kashmir.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is defined as a set of symptoms which occur after 'the person experienced, witnessed or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury or a threat to the physical integrity of the self or others' and 'the person's response involved, intensive fear, helplessness or horror'. PTSD has a global significance and its impact in countries that have been experiencing repeated disasters and social unrest for many years could be a large public health problem. PTSD emerges in the aftermath of traumatic events. Dr. Mustaq Margoob, a leading psychiatrist of valley reported significant increase in the number of individuals seeking treatment at a general hospital psychiatric unit (GHPU) in Srinagar. The individuals seeking treatment were 1200-1400 during 1980's, 1762 in 1990 and the number increased to 37860 in the year 2001 and then reached to 48000 by the year 2002. By the December 2004 this number of patients increased to 62000. The studies based on these patients found women and children to be the worst hit.

In the year 2001 a significant number of patients (2.38%) were diagnosed to be suffering from PTSD. Among these, 68.2% had immediate onset and 31.8% had delayed onset i.e onset after 6 months of the traumatic event. PTSD was rather unknown diagnoses in pre 90's but a sizeable number of outpatient cases were found suffering from it besides depressive disorders. These patient based figures are just a tip of the iceberg because still a majority of people use recourse to religion as a coping method.

A study done by Dr. Mushtaq margoob between September 2003 and august 2005 on a sample of 500 individuals, all above 18 years of age in all the six districts of Kashmir: Srinagar, Baramulla, Anantnag, Pulwama, Budgam and Kupwara showed:

Table 1: Total Sample Studied

	Total	Male	Female
	2391(100%)	1473(61.6%)	918(38.4%)
PTSD(Current)	174((7.27%)	105 (7.13%)	69(7.51%)
PTSD(lifetime)	363 (15.91%)	216 (14.66%)	147 (16.01%)

Coping Strategies

- Surrender to the will of God, i.e., prayers, visiting Shrines etc. 57.50%
- Sharing with relatives, neighbours and friends. 19.00%

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|------------------------|-------|
| • Stop talking | 6.25% |
| • Keeping oneself busy | 5.25% |
| • Aggression | 2.00% |
| • Tobacco | 3.00% |
| • Drugs/ medication | 1.50% |
| • Alcohol | 0.50% |
| • Can't say | 5.00% |

Source: JK- Practitioner 2006; 13 (suppl. 1)

Media and Health Issues

Media persons and media organizations are at the centre of development and health communication. Print media enjoys a special place in the collective consciousness of our society and represent the most readily available and potentially economical means of imparting information about the potent health issues like mental illness.

Press faces challenges to perform the public service role due to its growing alignment with big business. Lyn Gorman and David Mc Lean (2009) in *Media and society in to 21st century* highlights that corporate ownership of press has resulted in the sacrifice of journalistic standards to the demand of commerce. Nevertheless, as a source of news and information, press is still unequalled by other media.

(Golding and Murdock, 1978,) argued that mass media especially print media are most likely to change opinion when the information is targeted at specific readers, comes from a credible source, provides a personally relevant and engaging message.

The newspaper is an organ of persuasion and therefore plays a key role in changing public opinion and attitudes on social issues. This can be brought about by intentional advocacy-editorials, columns, interpretive articles, which are intended to guide and advise the reader. Print media provides lot of space to social marketers having the goal of inducing social change by performing public service functions. For instance, social advertising dealing with different goals.

Like reducing cigarette smoking or the substance abuse, prevention of mental health problems intends to induce long-term behavioural changes in the target population. (Rivers. L. William, Peterson Theodore (1971). *Mass media and modern society*. Vol-1. pp.20-35.)

OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH STUDY

- This research attempts to study and analyse the extent and nature of news coverage given to issues like mental health problems in leading newspaper of Kashmir “Greater Kashmir”.
- The study attempts to identify different forms of content which constitute daily news reports of mental health problems.

- The study attempts to analyse mental health awareness programme “Alaw bhaye Alaw” (Hello Brother Hello) aired on Radio Kashmir.
- The study attempts to analyse secondary data available on the mental health issues.

Hypothesis

The newspaper “Greater Kashmir” has given considerable representation to mental health issues in Kashmir.

Post traumatic stress disorder is the most commonly reported mental illness in news stories.

METHODOLOGY AND TECHNIQUE OF ANALYSIS

Quantitative Approach

Quantitative studies emphasize the measurement of quantifiable variables under study. It also involves analysis of causal relationships between variables. For the quantitative treatment of data, the methodology of Content analysis has been carried out in this study. The study is divided into two parts. Part 1 deals with content analysis of news stories of Greater Kashmir over the period of four years. Part 2 includes analysis of radio programme on mental illness “Alaw bhai Alaw” Hello Brother Hello.

The newspaper “Greater Kashmir” has been selected because it provides extensive coverage to social issues and is accessible easily all over Kashmir valley. More so, the newspaper has the largest circulation in the valley. Greater Kashmir was the first English language newspaper from the Kashmir Valley. The newspaper became a daily in 1993, and since then it has emerged as the leading English language newspaper in the valley. Today Greater Kashmir has a circulation of over 100,000. Apart from being read by the readers within the state its Web edition <http://www.greaterkashmir.com> receives on an average 1, 67 000 daily hits.

Period of Study

The period of study chosen for this research work is 2014 to 2017.

The content analysis method has been used to examine those stories that directly referred to mental health problems.

Mental Health Disorders Defined

According to WHO, “Mental health comprise a broad range of problems with different symptoms. They are generally characterised by a combination of abnormal thoughts, behaviour and relationship with others. Examples are schizophrenia, depression, intellectual disabilities and disorders due to drug abuse”.

The Sampling Technique

The study involves six editions of newspaper in one month. Hence, in one year (6x12) i.e. 72 editions of Greater Kashmir were considered for the study.

Over the period of 4years $72 \times 4 = 288$ editions in total were undertaken for study.

For the quantitative part, the parameters under study have been placed under following variables.

Table 2

1.	Frequency of Coverage
2.	Genres of news stories (news reports, analytical pieces, Opinion pieces, news briefs.
3.	Sources of stories
4.	The most frequently reported mental illness

FINDINGS

Table 3(a): Frequency of Coverage of News Items Pertaining to Mental Health Problems in the Year 2014

Month	No. of Stories Published
Jan-feb	1
March -April	0
May-June	1
July-August	3
Sept-Oct	2
Nov-Dec	1

Month	No. of Stories Published
Jan-feb	1
March -April	0
May-June	1
July-August	3
Sept-Oct	2
Nov-Dec	1

Table 3(b): Frequency of Coverage of News Items Pertaining to Mental Health Problems in the Year 2015

Month	No of Stories Published
Jan-feb	1
March -April	2
May-June	1
July-August	2
Sept-Oct	5
Nov-Dec	2

Table 3(c): Frequency of Coverage of News Items Pertaining to Mental Health Problems in the Year 2016

Month	No. of News Items Published
Jan-feb	1
March -April	1
May-June	4
July-August	0
Sept-Oct	4
Nov-Dec	2

Table 3(d): Frequency of Coverage of News Items Pertaining to Mental Health Problems in the Year 2017

Month	No. of Stories Published
Jan-feb	2
March -April	5
May-June	0
July-August	1
Sept-Oct	3
Nov-Dec	4

Table 3(e): The Most Frequently Reported Mental Illness in the Newspaper

Type of Mental Illness	No of Stories
PTSD	17
Depression	21
others	10

ANALYSIS

Table (a),b,c and d signifies that total number of stories published in the year 2014 is eight. In the year 2015, thirteen (13) stories on mental health problems has been published in Greater Kashmir. In 2016, 12 news stories were published in the newspaper. However, in 2017, the study reported 15 news stories on mental health problems. Most of these news stories were long analytical pieces based on research conducted by doctors, experts and NGOs like MSF (Doctors without Borders). Besides analytical and opinion based news stories, news reports were also observed by the researcher. The most frequently reported mental illness has been major depressive disorders, followed by PTSD (Post traumatic stress disorder). Some of the news reports analysed revealed that women and children are the worst victims of mental health problems. However, due to social taboo attached with this disease, women do not come forward for treatment. The majority of news stories indicated that mental health problems have increased in Kashmir.

Analysis of the Mental Health Programme *ALAW BHAYA AALWA* (in kashmiri) “Hello Brother Hello” Aired on Radio Kashmir Srinagar.

ALAW BHAYA AALWA, ‘HELLO BROTHER HELLO’ was broadcasted every Wednesday at 6.30 pm and its repeat broadcast was aired on Thursday at 8.30am from Radio Kashmir. The programme was a product of MSF, Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors without Borders). Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is an international medical humanitarian organisation that delivers aid to people affected by armed conflicts, epidemics, natural or man-made disasters, or exclusion from healthcare. The programme remained on air for 7 years from 2003 to 2010.

MSF has been working in the Kashmir valley since 2001, providing mental health care to people in need. After conducting survey MSF observed there is need to generate awareness among people through the instrument of media. They found radio as a best means of communicating this message because of its popularity and accessibility to people living in remote areas.

AALAW BHAYA AALAW was started in 2003 which remained on the air till 2010. From 2003 to 2010, five series of this programme were broadcasted; each series was of 10 episodes. The language selected for this programme was Kashmiri.

The programme was produced keeping in view the cultural, social & religious beliefs of the local population. The most frequently mental health topics covered in the programme included depression, Post traumatic stress disorder, suicide, drug abuse and family issues. The topics of this programme were based on the real stories of the patients. The producers did not sensationalise the programme. This revealed that ethical issues were taken into consideration while framing the episodes. Each episode of the programme started with the introduction of MSF in general followed by the MSF in Kashmir.

Format of the Programme

The programme was in a dialogue format, a conversation between Mir Saeb and Yasmeena, who were the radio anchors of this programme. Mir Saeb as an interviewer would ask questions to Yasmeena, a young female who would act as an subject expert replying queries with relevant and appropriate cultural examples. Radio skit was also used in this programme to depict in a dramatic way different mental health problems.

Conversational format opened up different dimensions of a subject and made it more appealing for people. The informational content of the programme had a profound influence on public opinion. The content of the programme also revealed.

- Psychological problems are not myths.
- Knowledge of psychopathology.
- Stress/ symptoms, normal reactions to abnormal situations, causes of stress and various factors like coping strategies, means to identify and strengthen them.
- Psychological problems should be acknowledged.

Feed Back of the Programme

MSF received some informal feedbacks from listeners and critics mainly from remote areas. An independent research committee was set up by ALL INDIA RADIO in 2008 to study the in-house programmes of Radio Kashmir. According to Mushtaq Latoo (Production Executive, Radio Kashmir) it was recognised in the committee that *AALAW BHAYA AALAW* has a tremendous reach and appeal.

CONCLUSIONS

Print media represents the most readily available and potentially economical means of imparting information about the important health issues. Mental distress is one such alarming health issue that is touching at the root of very existence in the contemporary society. In order to influence public opinion on such health issues, newspapers play a key role through intentional advocacy-editorials, columns, and interpretive articles.

In this backdrop, this research, has attempted to study the extent and nature of news coverage given to issues like mental health problems in the local broadsheet leading newspaper of Kashmir, 'Greater Kashmir'. For the purpose of analysis the study has been divided into two parts. Part-one involves the quantitative approach (content analysis of newspaper) and the second part includes the case study (qualitative approach) of radio programmes on mental distress.

Content analysis of the sample newspaper has been undertaken for the period of four years (2014 to 2017). For the quantitative part, the parameters under study have been placed under following variables:

- *Frequency of coverage.*
- *Genres of news stories*
- *Sources of news stories*
- *The most frequently reported mental illness.*

The findings, which emerged out of the study have confirmed the first hypothesis, i. e *Greater Kashmir has given considerable representation to mental health issues.* According to findings most of the stories were based on research conducted by experts and various doctors. More so, number of stories covered by newspaper has also increased over the given time period. However, a second hypothesis stands disapproved as most frequently reported mental illness has been 'depressed' and not PTSD. Further, the analysis of radio programme revealed that the content of the programme was very simple and appealing to the local population who could very easily identify their mental health problems through this programme. It also revealed that radio has tremendous potential to generate awareness about various health issues in Kashmir.

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